

by James Remington McCarthy

THE NEW DEAL IN TENNESSEE

REGIONAL PROBLEMS VERSUS SECTIONAL ANTAGONISMS

IF there is anything that makes a Southerner unreasonably irritated it is to suggest to him that the United States Government has stepped in to help him toward a new economic security and happiness. If you cite the advent of the Tennessee Valley Authority he loftily informs you that that particular government project is intended to help the nation as a whole, because it is an experiment. He will add that Southerners, and Tennesseans in particular, are providing most of the talent, labor, and time for the furtherance of the project. Yet, in the same breath, he will curse the government's regarding him and his fellow citizens as guinea pigs and will decry the fact—it is a fact—that Southern talent is being largely ignored, while talent from other parts of the country is given preference. In other words, there is either confused thinking or a misunderstanding, if not defiance, of new economic trends on the part of many Southerners today concerning the so-called New Deal.

It was not so many months ago, for instance, when a group of Southern manufacturers loudly applauded a speech by one John E. Edgerton who admitted he was apprehensive of an invasion of alien workers from the North. What he was thinking of, of course, was the wage differential, not the Tennessee Valley Authority. He—and every other industrialist present at the meeting—had in mind the thought that if the differential were wiped out, so that Southern wages would be on a par with Northern wages, it would prove disastrous. What these gentlemen feared was that they would be required to pay higher wages. But they coated their expression of such fears with the statement that the Anglo-Saxon content of the South must not be polluted by Northern and foreign

strains. This is an amazing attitude for a part of the nation which just now is the beneficiary of the greatest economic experiment ever conducted by the Federal Government. It reveals a sectionalism that is out of tune with the supposed new era and contradicts the South's supposed hopes for a new prosperity. It gives color to the rumor that the South does not want either progress or prosperity because it would bring too much money to those who shouldn't have it. It gives added color to the generally accepted belief that Southerners haven't forgotten the Civil War and are antagonistic toward Northerners.

My own experience has led me to accept the rumors and the generally accepted beliefs. As a Northerner—and God knows I never thought of myself as one until I entered the South—I was interested only in finding out what the significance of the Tennessee Valley Authority, in relation to the country as a whole, really was. I felt that to be my duty as a journalist and my right as an American. I was well aware that the funds to promote the authority's activities had come out of the national pocketbook—not the Southern pocketbook or the Tennessee Valley pocketbook. But to my amazement, I discovered an antagonistic attitude toward me and my curiosities that seemed out of all reason. Let me hasten to say, parenthetically, that there were several gentlemen of eminent intellectual attainments (as Senator "Ham" Lewis might say on the floor of the United States Senate) who went out of their way to help me. They had no sectional inhibitions and consequently made my task easier than it might have been. But among the rank and file of citizens and officials there was only distrust, suspicion and outward hostility. They seemed to feel that I was an "outsider" who was putting his nose into business that was not his concern. Indeed, after writing a few articles for a Chattanooga newspaper, I was surprised to learn that many readers resented a "Northerner" telling them about themselves. In other words, I was convinced that no matter what you may hear, no matter what fine speeches may be made at Gettysburg or on Lookout Mountain on Memorial Day, the South still dreams angrily of the Civil War. When you speak to anyone below the Mason and Dixon line about "the war" they do not think of the World War but of the Civil War. This is all quite deplorable but equally significant when anyone at-

tempts to write of the Tennessee Valley Authority and its great experiment.

Southern industrialists express the fear that the invasion of Northern labor, as a result of elimination of the wage differential, would force the people of the South to accustom themselves to new and alien standards, customs, and philosophies. They seem to think that the South must be preserved for Southerners only, something which defies the whole spirit of pioneering. Of course, in many respects, the industrialists and the average citizens cannot be entirely blamed for this attitude. The Tennessee Valley Authority's early activities were anything but happily diplomatic. Average Southerners have watched the experts come down from Washington and establish what to them amounted to a super-regional government with headquarters at Knoxville, Tennessee. They have listened as these experts told them, in the manner of first-class seers, about the great day awaiting them—a day of the distant future. They have heard of reservoirs that will wipe out their homes, of dams that will provide them with cheap power, of "relocation" plans that will transfer them to other areas, of decentralization projects that will set up industries in rural communities, of land planning, of home planning, of afforestation, soil erosion and navigation, flood control and fertilizer distribution. They have listened and watched—and many of them are bewildered. But their feelings do not always end with bewilderment. They are also tinged with more than a trace of resentment. It has come to their ears that they are, so to speak, on a national dissecting table. They are to be a part of the great American Experiment. The more intelligent of the Tennessee Valley have accepted this with a cynical good-humor but the more impatient cry: "We are not guinea pigs!" Again, the people of the Valley, particularly of Tennessee itself, feel restless at the importation of Northern blood into the comfortably furnished offices of the Tennessee Valley Authority in Knoxville. Both the intelligent and the uninformed are asking: Is a form of dominion government being forced upon us from Washington?

II.

All these things, of course, may appeal to the reader and to the people at Washington, particularly, as unwarranted and unfair.

What is fair, however, is that the Tennessee Valley Authority was not established as an emergency measure to "aid" a state or a section. It is a long-range proposition whose real accomplishments and impacts may not be judged or felt for another twenty-five or even fifty years. The physical achievements—in the form of dams and reservoirs and even the introduction of new industries—may be visible within a few years. But the social effects of the Tennessee Experiment surely cannot be appraised until another generation has arrived. That generation, so it is believed, will fit itself into the new pattern because it will be free of the old conservatisms and doubts.

But while all that is true it is a living generation that must be dealt with today. Perhaps there might have been no trouble, no doubts today, had not the Utopians entered upon the scene. There were two classes of Utopians. One consisted of writers, amateur sociologists, professors, newspaper columnists from New York who, after a hurried trip to Knoxville, with perhaps a few side trips to Muscle Shoals and the Norris Dam site, went home and solemnly analyzed the Valley experiment for the benefit of the outside world. That did not bother the people of the valley so much. It was the other group—the government officials, engineers and economists—who came down to "run the works" and to tell the Tennessee Valley people all about themselves and their colorful, promising future. This second group began to upset the confidence of many people. They came in the manner of missionaries bent upon saving the benighted heathen. They assumed the attitude that they were qualified to tell the Tennessee people about themselves because, after all, had they not "majored" in all matters concerning economics, sociology, industrial relations and heaven-knows-what-else? What they overlooked was the calibre, mental and moral, of the people of the valley and mountain populations. They are a people who cannot be easily "reformed" or "modernized". They are of a stock, largely, that goes back to the old immigrations of stout English, Scottish, and Irish settlers who went to Tennessee and made their homes there and asked for nothing else but to be left alone and to achieve their own happiness.

The human composition of what we conveniently call "The Valley" is diverse indeed. You can go into some parts of the Ten-

nessee mountains where they still talk Elizabethan English. You even may hear them sing ballads that deal with the unfortunate fate of Barbara Allen and of the hangman at the forks of the creek. You will hear one of them say: "We-uns haint no call to be ashamed o' ourselves nor of ary thing we do. We ax no favors. We stay 'way up hyar and mind our own business". On the other hand, there are flourishing towns, busy industrial centers where modern methods are as well known and as thoroughly applied as in any other part of the nation. There are flourishing farms, too. It may be utterly true that most of the people have little money—there are thousands of families, particularly in the mountain and rural communities, whose total income is less than fifty dollars a year—or that they live, many of them, in shacks, without even a real bathtub. But it is not by choice that they live in such miserly discomfort: the reason is that they cannot enjoy modern civilized luxuries and necessities without income. That factor the "experts" largely overlooked as they swarmed into the valley and over the mountains. They came singing a gospel of reform. They spoke glowingly of introducing basket-weaving and other manual arts into little homes. They told the mountaineer and the valley man that they must change from the old ways of living to the new and enlightened ways. The government's missionaries did not even stop there. They talked of promoting a folk lore and folk songs and folk dances. There was talk, in fact, that the Tennessee Valley might well have, in view of its forthcoming self-containment, a special currency! The people of the valley were told, also, that they would be taught the uses of electric refrigerators, modern cooking stoves, heaters, vacuum cleaners, and such. In other words, the valley people regarded themselves as being treated as though they were the untutored inhabitants of some island colony. It was only natural that many people in the Tennessee Basin should have become apprehensive, if not resentful. They resented the suggestion that they were incapable of handling their own destinies. They resented the implication that Washington was the seat of a government which regarded the valley as a colony.

III.

But there is another side to the picture. The Government lately has been pouring millions of dollars into the Tennessee Valley. The people of the valley—and all Southerners, it seems—appear to forget that the Tennessee Valley Authority was not created by Tennessee funds alone nor its cause furthered by Southern industrialists alone. The funds came out of the national treasury, as I have said before, and a mid-Western United States Senator was the leading advocate in Congress of the valley development and many of the leading experts of the TVA, coming from other sections, identified themselves with the organization at a financial loss to themselves. The TVA, in other words, is a regional project, not a sectional one. It is based on the thought of eventually bringing the full and contented life to the people of that territory in the South, regardless of the extravagant, irritating, and misleading statements of some of its administrators. Therefore, if the people of the Tennessee Valley want to adopt the attitude of the Southern industrialists and say “wages must be kept low to keep out the outsiders” they are revealing themselves as curiously inconsistent. They are willing to reach out one hand and take what the government gives them—they are as equally determined to put up the other hand toward the North and say: “They shall not pass”—the people, not the dollars.

There is no large area in this country that ever was brought to a realization of prosperity by assuming an insular attitude. Some time ago Secretary of Agriculture Wallace mentioned that an Arkansan said a wall could be built about his State and it could remain self-contained. It might be suggested to the Arkansan that ten years after that wall had been built the weeds within would be higher than the wall itself. It is the way with economy. As another instance, Texas declared for “free territory” for independent action not long ago. Very high sounding. Texas for the Texans. But Texas did not hesitate to accept more than one hundred million dollars in Federal relief and other funds. Those funds did *not* come out of the pockets of Texans alone but out of the pockets of the people in every State in the Union.

What all this comes down to, of course, is that the new regionalism is having a struggle with sectionalism. Regionalism means

the national welfare first. Sectionalism means selfish self-containment. The Tennessee Valley experiment is regionalistic and is intended as a part of the national pattern. But the utterances of some industrialists—and others not so important—suggest a mood of sectionalism which would frown upon anything that doesn't benefit the South. It is all right, of course, for the industrialists to insist upon a wage differential in the South. But they should be careful not to be hypocritical about it. They should base it on other grounds than the horrible threat of a "Northern or Federal invasion".

The truth is, there already is an invasion. It is a Federal invasion of the South in the benevolent form of the Tennessee Valley Authority. There will, in time, be similar invasions in other regions of the United States. And any region that talks high-handedly about keeping out "aliens" from the North, East, or West might very well be consistent. They ought also, under the circumstances, to refuse to accept the relief and promotional funds that come out of the pockets of *all* the people of the nation.

by L. Robert Lind

TIGER WINGS

The tiger lilies all one way
Bend to the grass and slowly fall,
Where solemn robins pick and stray,
Under the wall.
Green grass and wet, with sun to stir the drops,
Grows wide about, but only these bright wings
Of some strange bird of Paradise
Now stop
 The heart with swaying colour.
 Under the wall,
The tiger lilies all one way
Bend to the grass and slowly fall.